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ABSTRACT

This research brief discusses racial and ethnic trends in college enrollment and participation since the mid-1970s, focusing on Black, Hispanic, Asian American, and American Indian students. Data are provided in text and tables, on the following topics: (1) potential supply of higher education students; (2) Scholastic Aptitude Test averages by race and ethnicity from 1982 to 1988; (3) total enrollment in higher education by gender, ethnic group, and institution type, from 1976 to 1986; and (4) graduate and professional school enrollment by ethnic group. Highlights of the data include: though total enrollment of these groups has increased, a smaller percentage of Black and Hispanic high school graduates were enrolled in college in 1988 than in the mid-1970s; increases in Black, Hispanic, and American Indian enrollment tended to be concentrated in two-year institutions; and from 1976 to 1986, Black males actually lost ground in college attendance by 34,000 students. Policy and research recommendations for addressing this situation focus on the need to improve the academic skills of school-age children and to develop comprehensive approaches in higher education to reverse the declining participation of underrepresented groups. (Contains four end notes, three data resources, and nine references.) (JDD)

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American Council on Education, Washington, D.C.*

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U.S. demographics are changing rapidly due to sizeable increases in the Hispanic and Asian American populations, and moderate growth in the Black population. It is projected that by the year 2000, Black, Hispanic, Asian American, and American Indian workers will comprise one-third of the net additions to the U.S. labor force. However, despite progress in the overall educational attainment of these groups, Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians are still underrepresented at all levels of postsecondary education. Some consider the need to better educate all our citizenry as a general social imperative, while others view it as essential to keeping America competitive in an expanding world economy. Still others cite historical and economic inequities as reasons for addressing this concern. But whatever view educators take, they agree that as a nation we can not continue to place this issue at a low priority.

In this research brief we discuss racial and ethnic trends in college enrollment and participation since the mid-1970s, and identify the policy implications of these trends.

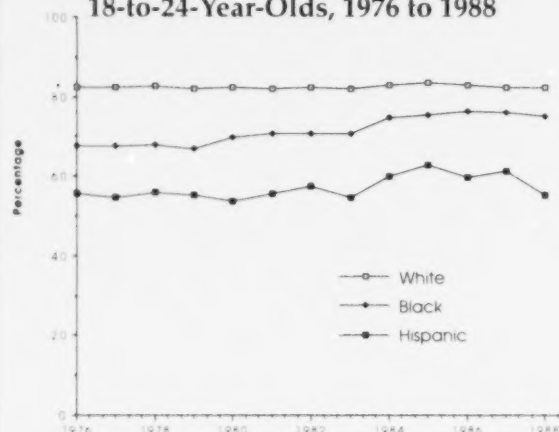
HIGHLIGHTS

- Asians, Hispanics, and Blacks are a growing portion of the traditional college-age population, yet a smaller percentage of Black and Hispanic high school graduates are enrolling in college than in the mid-1970s.
- Statistics can be misleading. Due to numerical gains in college enrollment among Asian Americans and Hispanics, the total enrollment of these four groups in the nation's colleges and universities increased 33 percent between 1976 and 1986. However, there was an actual decline in the percentage of Black and Hispanic high school graduates attending college. Overall numerical increases tend to overshadow the disproportionately low college participation of Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians.
- Between 1976 and 1988, the percentage of Black and Hispanic high school graduates enrolled in college declined dramatically. The enrolled-in-college participation rate for Blacks dropped from 33 percent in 1976 to 28 percent in 1988, while the Hispanic rate declined from 36 percent to 31 percent.
- During the last decade, Black males lost ground in college attendance. In 1986, there were 34,000 fewer Black males enrolled in college than in 1976, representing a loss of 7 percent.
- Increases in Black, Hispanic, and American Indian enrollment tend to be concentrated in two-year institutions. Between 1976 and 1986, their enrollment in two-year colleges rose nearly twice as fast as their enrollment in four-year colleges and universities.
- Although Black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian enrollments in graduate and professional schools grew faster than the general enrollment from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians are still grossly underrepresented in postbaccalaureate studies.

IMPLICATIONS

- Since higher educational attainment for all racial and ethnic groups is a necessary goal, we as a nation must work to improve the academic skills of school-age children and develop comprehensive approaches in higher education to reverse the declining participation of underrepresented groups. Continued and expanded efforts are required to increase the college participation of low-income students.
- Students of color are becoming more concentrated in two-year colleges, making these institutions even more critical as gateways through which many Hispanic, American Indian, and Black students can enter higher education.
- Additional programs, resources, and support are needed to promote the articulation of larger numbers of these students to four-year institutions.

Figure 1
High School Completion Rates for
18-to-24-Year-Olds, 1976 to 1988



Source: American Council on Education, Eighth Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education 1989.

PARTICIPATION AND ENROLLMENT TRENDS

The Potential Supply

- Between 1976 and 1988, the percentage of young people completing high school improved more for Blacks (from 68 percent to 75 percent) than for any other racial or ethnic group (figure 1).¹
- The percentage of Black youth, ages 18 to 24, who have a high school diploma has increased significantly, but it still lags behind the white rate of 82 percent (1988).
- When compared to white and Black 18-to-24-year-olds, Hispanic youth have the lowest high school completion rate. Although the Hispanic high school completion rate fluctuated between 1976 and 1988, the rate of 55 percent remained extremely low compared to the average completion rate of 81 percent for all.
- In large urban areas, in particular, the percentage of Black and Hispanic youth who graduate from high school is generally lower than the national average; their high school graduation rates range between 50 and 60 percent, compared to the national average of 82 percent.
- Despite gains in the overall high school completion rate for Blacks between 1976 and 1988, the completion rates for dependent Blacks and Hispanics from low-income families did not change significantly between 1976 and 1988.²
- Equivalent data on high school completions and college participation for Asian Americans and American Indians are not available through the U.S. Census Bureau. However, according to the "High School

Table 1
SAT Averages by Race and Ethnicity,
1982-1988

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
SAT Verbal							
American Indian	388	388	390	392	NA	393	393
Asian American	398	395	398	404	NA	405	408
Black	341	339	342	346	NA	351	353
Mexican							
American	377	375	376	382	NA	379	382
Puerto Rican	360	358	358	368	NA	360	355
Other Hispanic	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	387	387
White	444	443	445	449	NA	447	445
SAT Mathematical							
American Indian	424	425	427	428	NA	432	435
Asian American	513	514	519	518	NA	521	522
Black	366	369	373	376	NA	377	384
Mexican							
American	416	417	420	426	NA	424	428
Puerto Rican	403	403	405	409	NA	400	402
Other Hispanic	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	432	433
White	483	484	487	490	NA	489	490

Note: SAT scores by ethnic group are not available for 1986 due to changes in the Student Descriptive Questionnaire (SDQ) that students complete when they register for the tests. The SDQ question on ethnic background was changed to include the "Other Hispanic" category for 1987.

Source: Educational Testing Service, as cited in *Black Issues in Higher Education*, March 30, 1989, p.15.

and Beyond" study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, 93 percent of the Asian Americans who were high school sophomores in 1980 graduated by 1982, compared to 67 percent of American Indians.³

- Of the 1982 high school seniors, 70 percent of Asian American students and 21 percent of American Indian students enrolled in higher education by fall 1982, representing the high and low ends of the scale, respectively.⁴ (The corresponding rate for Blacks was 32 percent, for Hispanics — 33 percent, and for whites — 46 percent.)
- The academic preparation of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian high school students is improving. All three groups experienced sizeable gains on college placement tests between 1982 and 1988. Blacks showed the largest gains, averaging a 12 point improvement in math and an 18 point gain in verbal abilities (table 1).
- College-bound students from these groups also made significant gains in math, science, and foreign language coursetaking during this same period. In 1988, over 90 percent of these students took at least three years of math, compared to approximately 80 percent in 1982.

Table 2
Total Enrollment in Higher Education,
Selected Years, 1976 to 1986
 (numbers in thousands)

<u>All Institutions</u>	1976	1980	1984	1986
Total	10,986	12,087	12,235	12,501
White, non-Hispanic	9,076	9,833	9,815	9,914
Total minority	1,691	1,949	2,085	2,243
Black, non-Hispanic	1,033	1,107	1,076	1,081
Hispanic	384	472	535	624
¹ Asian American	198	286	390	448
American Indian	76	84	84	90
Nonresident alien	219	305	335	344
Men				
Total	5,794	5,868	5,859	5,885
White, non-Hispanic	4,814	4,773	4,690	4,464
Total minority	827	885	939	1,007
Black, non-Hispanic	470	464	437	436
Hispanic	210	232	245	29
¹ Asian American	108	151	210	239
American Indian	39	38	38	40
Nonresident alien	154	211	231	232
Women				
Total	5,191	6,219	6,376	6,615
White, non-Hispanic	4,262	5,060	5,125	5,268
Total minority	864	1,064	1,146	1,237
Black, non-Hispanic	563	643	639	645
Hispanic	174	240	281	332
¹ Asian American	89	135	180	209
American Indian	38	46	46	51
Nonresident alien	65	94	104	111

¹Asian American includes Pacific Islanders.

Source: American Council on Education, *Seventh Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education*, 1988.

A Decade of College Enrollment

- Between 1976 and 1986, due to increases in Asian American and Hispanic enrollment, increases in minority enrollments outpaced increases in total enrollment, 33 percent compared to 14 percent (table 2). Nevertheless, the percentage of Black 18-to-24-year-old high school graduates who were enrolled in college declined from 33 percent in 1976 to 28 percent in 1988. Although Hispanics increased in the number of students enrolled in college, they reported a similar decline in overall college participation as a group, from 36 percent to 31 percent. Whites showed increases during this period, 33 percent compared to 38 percent.

Table 3
Enrollment in Institutions by Type,
1976 to 1986, Selected Years
 (numbers in thousands)

<u>Two-year Institutions</u>	1976	1980	1984	1986
Total	3,879	4,521	4,527	4,675
White, non-Hispanic	3,077	3,558	3,514	3,575
Total minority	760	899	961	1,047
Black, non-Hispanic	429	472	459	466
Hispanic	210	255	289	345
¹ Asian American	79	124	167	186
American Indian	41	47	46	51
Nonresident alien	42	64	53	53
<u>Four-year Institutions</u>				
Total	7,107	7,565	7,708	7,826
White, non-Hispanic	5,999	6,275	6,301	6,340
Total minority	931	1,050	1,124	1,195
Black, non-Hispanic	604	634	617	615
Hispanic	174	217	246	278
¹ Asian American	119	162	223	262
American Indian	35	37	38	40
Nonresident alien	177	241	282	291

¹Asian American includes Pacific Islanders.

Source: American Council on Education, *Seventh Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education*, 1988.

- Blacks, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and American Indians represented 18 percent of the college enrollment or 2.2 million students in 1986. While the Hispanic and Asian share of total enrollment increased, the Black share declined slightly from 1976 to 1986. The American Indian share remained unchanged over the decade at 0.7 percent.
- The sharpest decline in Black enrollment is seen among Black males. From 1976 to 1986, Black male enrollment declined by 34,000 students (7 percent), compared to a 3 percent decline in white male enrollment, and a 15 percent increase in enrollment of Black women.
- Increases in the enrollment of American Indians, Hispanics, and Blacks were concentrated in two-year institutions. Their enrollment in two-year colleges rose by nearly twice as fast as it did in four-year institutions (table 3).
- Over 55 percent of the Hispanics and 57 percent of the American Indians who attended college were enrolled in a two-year college in 1986, compared to 43 percent of Blacks, 42 percent of Asian Americans, and 36 percent of whites.
- Transfer rates among these four groups are also uneven. Overall, of the high school seniors who

Table 4
Graduate Enrollment,
Selected Years, 1976 to 1986
(numbers in thousands)

Race/Ethnicity of Student	1976	1980	1984	1986
Total	1,211	1,250	1,344	1,434
White, non-Hispanic	1,030	1,030	1,087	1,132
Total minority	119	125	141	166
Black, non-Hispanic	72	66	67	72
Hispanic	22	27	32	46
¹ Asian American	21	28	37	43
American Indian	4	4	5	5
Nonresident alien	73	94	115	136

¹Asian American includes Pacific Islanders.

Source: American Council on Education, *Seventh Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education*, 1988.

entered a two-year college in 1980, approximately 29 percent transferred to a four-year institution by 1985. For Blacks, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and American Indians the corresponding rates were 18 percent, 23 percent, 41 percent, and 30 percent, respectively.

College Enrollment Trends 1986 to 1988

- In fall 1988, Blacks, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and American Indians made up 17 percent of the entering full-time freshman college class. Blacks comprised just under 10 percent, 3 percent were Hispanic, 3 percent were Asian American, and .8 percent were American Indian.
- A number of states reported significantly increased minority enrollment in 1988, compared to the prior year. These states included Maryland, California, Michigan, and Florida. In Maryland, increases in Black enrollment were larger than increases in total enrollment: there, the decline in college attendance of Blacks from inner-city areas, was offset by increased enrollment of Blacks from suburban areas.
- Enrollment changes in traditionally Black colleges is especially significant. Between 1987 and 1988, enrollment at historically Black colleges increased 3 percent, following a 2 percent gain from 1986 to 1987. These increases reversed a four year downward trend.

Graduate Enrollment

- Between 1976 and 1986, graduate enrollment among students of color increased 17 percent; however, while Asian Americans and Hispanics more than doubled their graduate enrollment during this period, American Indians experienced little change. Only 4,000 to 5,000 American Indians enrolled in graduate school yearly (table 4).

Table 5
Professional School Enrollment,
Selected Years, 1976 to 1986
(numbers in thousands)

Race/Ethnicity of Student	1976	1980	1984	1986
Total	244	277	278	270
White, non-Hispanic	220	248	243	230
Total minority	21	26	32	36
Black, non-Hispanic	11	13	13	14
Hispanic	5	7	8	9
¹ Asian American	4	6	9	11
American Indian	1	1	1	1
Nonresident alien	3	3	3	4

¹Asian American includes Pacific Islanders.

Source: American Council on Education, *Seventh Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education*, 1988.

- Black enrollment in graduate school declined between 1976 and 1984, but increased nearly 8 percent between 1984 and 1986. This gain brought the Black graduate enrollment level back to the 1976 level of 72,000, which was its highest. However, their relative share of the graduate enrollment declined slightly during this decade due to overall increases in graduate enrollment.
- Even with the gains made over the preceding ten years, in 1986, with 166,000 students enrolled, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians represented less than 12 percent of the graduate enrollment. Black students made up 5 percent; Hispanics, 3 percent; Asian Americans, 3 percent; and American Indians, less than half a percent.

Professional School Enrollment

- Racial/ethnic enrollments in professional school were most significant. While professional school enrollment overall increased 11 percent, from 244,000 in 1976 to 270,000 in 1986, the combined enrollment of African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians rose 71 percent (table 5).
- Blacks gained 27 percent in professional school enrollment, compared to an 80 percent gain for Hispanics, and nearly a tripling in the number of Asian Americans enrolled. American Indian enrollment remained unchanged at approximately 1,000 students yearly.
- In 1986, these groups represented 13 percent of the enrollment at this level, compared to 9 percent in 1976. With the exception of American Indians, this is the only level at which each group experienced an increase in both the number of students enrolled and in their proportional share of the enrollment.

IMPLICATIONS

Although there is still a tremendous need to decrease the high school drop-out rate and improve the academic skills of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students, both the number and percentage of Black and Hispanic youth receiving a high school diploma have increased. Judging from recent improvements on college placement tests, gains in college preparatory coursetaking, and other indicators of academic performance, many of these students are better prepared for college entrance than their predecessors. However, these gains have not translated into larger percentages of these youngsters attending college.

In order to adequately prepare our youth to compete in the 21st century, the nation as a whole, and higher education in particular, must put the issue of increased college participation for underrepresented groups higher on its list of priorities. Stronger federal, state, and institutional policies are needed to reverse the declining college-going rates of Black and Hispanic youth. The following is a set of key policy and research recommendations for addressing this dilemma.

- To expand the pool of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian high school students who are academically prepared for college, a variety of initiatives are needed that connect elementary and secondary education (particularly in large urban areas) to higher education and the work place.
- Since Hispanic, American Indian, Asian American, and Black college students are more likely to attend two-year institutions than their white counterparts, greater cooperation must be fostered between two-year and four-year institutions to increase baccalaureate attainment among these groups. We need coherent and practical plans to strengthen the transfer function between two-year colleges and four-year institutions.
- A number of colleges have successful recruitment and retention programs targeted specifically towards Black men. These programs should be encouraged, studied, and emulated.
- Despite recent enrollment gains, Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians continue to be underrepresented in graduate and professional schools. To help close this gap, students should be encouraged early in their educational careers to pursue an advanced degree. More financial support for scholarships, fellowships, and teaching assistantships must be made available at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.
- Financial aid policies need substantial restructuring to promote increased grant availability, lower eligibility requirements, and to keep pace with inflation and tuition costs.
- Since Hispanics, Asian Americans, and African Americans represent a growing proportion of the college-age population, gains in their enrollments do not necessarily mean that larger proportions of them are attending college. In monitoring progress in this area, institutions must pay closer attention to comparisons between the racial and ethnic composition of the population they serve and each group's proportional representation on campus.
- To better monitor and evaluate changes in racial and ethnic diversity in higher education, federal and state data collection systems need to be improved. In particular, more national data should be available on high school completion rates, college-going rates, and college completion rates of American Indians and Asian Americans.
- For Hispanics and Asian Americans, high school completion and college participation rates should be studied to determine the impact of newly immigrated populations on these rates.
- Although some states reported gains in Black enrollment between 1986 and 1988, there is an indication that there was a drop in the number of Black urban youth attending college. Further analysis of college-going rates by race, income level, and locale are needed to determine the extent of these trends.

While this list is certainly not exhaustive, we must begin to envisage concrete first steps toward meeting the challenge of expanding and creating successful efforts to assume greater racial and ethnic diversity in higher education.

END NOTES

- 1 These figures include GED recipients.
- 2 The data are based on 18-to-24-year-old high school graduates enrolled in college as of October of that year who are financially dependent on their families.
- 3 The high school graduation rates from the "High School and Beyond" survey (HSB) are generally higher than comparable figures from the U.S. Census Bureau. Part of this difference can be attributed to the fact that HSB only includes high school students during or after their sophomore year. A significant number of youngsters have dropped out of school prior to the sophomore year, and subsequently HSB data does not take this into account. Census Bureau figures account for students who drop out early in their educational careers and are therefore more representative of the total 18-to-24-year-old population.
- 4 Unfortunately, it is not possible to conduct a thorough analysis of college participation trends for Asian Americans and American Indians since data are not available annually. However, based on the limited information that is available, American Indian high school seniors have the lowest college-going rate of all groups (1982). Although Asians have the highest college-going rate as a group, members of certain Asian groups have little formal education and consequently never attend college. Some Asian American college students, like many Hispanic students, also must overcome language barriers, since English is not their first language.

RESOURCES

1. The U.S. Census Bureau provides data on high school completion and college enrollment by age and sex. College participation rates are calculated from these data. This information is reported annually in *School Enrollment—Social and Economic Characteristics of Students, Series P-20*. The report presents tabulations of data as of October of each year and summary trend data. For further information, contact United States Census Bureau, Current Population Division at (202) 763-1154.
2. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides college enrollment data by race, ethnicity, and sex. Between 1976 and 1986, racial and ethnic data were collected biennially through the Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS) and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. As of 1987, these data are collected and reported annually. In 1988, NCES released *Trends in Minority Enrollment in Higher Education, 1976-1986*, which summarizes enrollment changes during that period. For further information, contact National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Division at (202) 357-6373.
3. The American Council on Education's annual status report, *Minorities in Higher Education*, also contains trend data on high school completion and college participation rates, compiled from Census Bureau data. For further information, contact the Office of Minority Concerns at (202) 939-9395.

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